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Office of the Mayor

State of the City Address
2018

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Welcome City Council, honored guests, and fellow residents, to the State of the City Address.

Thank you for being here today. Taking the time to attend demonstrates your commitment to our community.

This is my third State of the City Address and there is much to celebrate about the City. I'm proud to showcase the progress and changes we've made in 2018. We focus on what is best for the City and our residents.

Keeping City finances at the forefront continues to be a priority. Altoona is financially healthy and we finished 2018 strong. The City budget provides or subsidizes services including 24-hour police protection, a professional fire department, street maintenance paving and plowing, street lighting, transit service, parks and recreation, and recycling; sustainability of these municipal services must remain a primary goal. We enter 2019 engaged in prudent fiscal management and policy in order to remain strong. Our detailed budget is available for your convenience on the City's website. I want to thank every City department for their dedication and fiscal responsibility.

Altoona is blessed to have a committed police force dedicated to reducing crime, building community relations and uniting with other agencies to ensure our neighborhoods are safer. The Altoona Police Department is committed to serving our community. They support law enforcement agencies statewide and participate in PA Special Olympics fundraising as well as other events year-round. More than twenty APD officers participated in the Special Olympics Polar Plunge at Canoe Creek State Park raising over \$11,000. APD officers continue to donate and fundraise for this important event over the past 2 years.

Grant money received enabled APD to purchase four Trek Powerfly E-Bikes for the Bike Patrol. The E-Bikes utilize an electric motor that assists the bike officer in pedaling harder and faster. Officers working an 8-hour shift, wearing 20+ pounds of police related equipment, felt the benefits with faster response times, the ability to

negotiate all terrains in the city, and less fatigue and injuries. With just a few hours of charging, the E-bikes are capable of traveling up to 27+ MPH, with a battery life of 50-90 miles, depending on the power setting.

Through a generous donation, APD was able to purchase a Bounce Imaging Ball Camera for the Tactical Response Team (TRT). This versatile tactical camera is a softball sized rubber ball, that has cameras surrounding it 360-degrees. The capabilities of this type of tactical camera gives officers the upper hand when conducting searches of houses and buildings. Its versatility allows the ball to be thrown, suspended, or used as a pole camera. The camera provides a 360-degree view for tactical officers and command staff using Bluetooth wireless technology. During the summer of 2018, APD was awarded a License Plate Reader (LPR) through the Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority. The LPR is mounted on the roof of a marked patrol vehicle that is commonly assigned to dedicated traffic enforcement. With the elimination of registration stickers, it is difficult for officers to know when registrations are expired or suspended. The LPR enables officers to scan hundreds of license plates.

APD finished the year with a very successful National Night Out. This was our 2nd Annual event that attracted over 2000 people. Several Police, Fire and EMS vehicles were on display, as well as heavy equipment from the Altoona Highway Department. Children and adults had a blast learning the ins and outs of different vehicles. The event boasted live entertainment, food, games and several Blair County organizations that provide services to the public. This beneficial event connects APD with community members to discuss issues, ask questions, and have general conversations with our police officers. It's a benefit to both community members and APD.

Lastly, it is important to mention - patrol car cameras have been a part of our police department for over a decade. In an effort to increase accountability and transparency, body cameras were in the works for our officers in 2018 and became a reality as they were rolled out in January of 2019. All of these programs are the latest public safety technology initiatives for our City of Altoona Police Department.

Accomplishments within the Altoona Fire Department include completed updates to the Department Tactical Standard Operating Procedures to ensure compliance with the most current practices and NFPA Standards for Fire Department response.

The Altoona Fire Department conducted over 800 hours of certification training on leadership, equipment, techniques, tactics and procedures, increasing the operational efficiency of the Fire Department. Training is based on the operational needs of the Fire Department and funded by a federal FEMA grant.

Successful change to a new third-party billing company provided compatibility with the City's current fire department management software. This will allow recovery costs for false alarms in addition to motor vehicle accidents and has already increased revenue for cost recovery by \$10,000 in 2018.

AFD very recently rolled out a new pumper for Station 320 in Juniata with new up to date equipment including battery operated rescue tools. Residents are invited to stop and see the new equipment. A new mid mount aerial truck with platform for service out of Station 310 on Washington Avenue is expected to be rolled out any day now. The platform aerial will make ventilation and rescue operations much safer for firefighters and victims.

AFD recently hired six firefighters to replace those either retiring or moving to other fire departments. This process includes getting the candidates trained to national certification levels, hazardous materials response, and emergency medical technicians. The City is conducting their own Fire Training Academy which is set to wrap up soon, followed by a graduation ceremony.

The Altoona Fire Department is moving forward with improvements in their Community Risk Reduction Plan through a robust fire inspections program. This program identified hundreds of fire safety issues that avoided the possibility of fire in commercial buildings throughout the City of Altoona. In addition, they increased their Fire Education programs in schools, businesses, and care facilities. AFD's fire education programs reached 4,881 children and 2,265 adults in 2018. The Fire Department also serves as Blair County's HazMat team and we are thankful for the County's continued support.

Our Police and Fire public safety personnel have modern, functioning equipment and we remain committed to sustaining this goal.

2019 National Public Works Week will be held May 19th through May 25th with an appropriate theme - *It Starts Here*. This theme represents the daily goals and objectives of our public works department. Infrastructure Improvement, Growth, Innovation and Creativity, and Increased Mobility – all leading to a healthier City.

In 2018 we invested in our roads, parks, facilities, buildings, and fleet. Public Works sought and received grant funds for the 12th Street Crossover Project, PennDOT's Green Light Go Signal Improvement Project, ARLE Grant for Decorative Crosswalks and Signal Detection, street paving, and LED re-lamping just to name a few.

Engineering managed 16 projects worth over 3 million dollars. One of those projects that I consider a win/win is The St. Therese Rain Garden. This project helped the City fulfill increasingly stringent requirements for preventing stormwater contaminants from entering area streams. The project was a hands-on collaboration between Public Works and Holy Trinity Catholic Elementary students.

The Codes and Inspections Department issued 673 building permits in 2018. They had an 87% compliance rate for property maintenance inspections. New commercial buildings and other projects inspected include: Altoona Area High School, Kranich's Jewelers, Rutter's Convenience Store, Graystone Grand Palazzo, The Silk Mill, JJ Hadley & Co, The Bakery, Cooper Building, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, and UPMC Altoona.

The Codes and Inspections Department participated in the 1st Annual Community Clean-Up Day. Four code officers spent time identifying properties in need of minor painting, weeds and vegetation removal, and litter/debris collection on sidewalks. The officers were also present to man the dumpsters and assist with collection.

The Department of Community Development continues to focus on attracting new investment into the community through new business ventures and expansion of our housing market. I'm pleased to announce that in 2018, 22 of 31 ABCD Corp economic development projects occurred in the City of Altoona. This resulted in the creation of 171 new jobs, which accounted for 85% of the job creation in Blair County, and a total investment of almost \$17 million dollars. ABCD Corp is an integral city partner and we are proud to cohesively work together to bring new development to Altoona.

The Department of Administration continues to ensure that the City departments have the information and support needed to carry out their respective functions. They play an integral part, spending numerous hours working with the public, businesses, and community organizations. The Administration Department is moving to the next phase of communication with the public by testing the Citizens Request for Action module. This technology allows residents to make requests for service, which provides monitoring status of the issue. Implementation of the Citizens Request for Action Module will increase efficiencies, eliminate redundancy and improve transparency for, and responsiveness to, the public. We continue to embrace technological advancements this year. Our Information Technology Department continues to meet the needs of City staff with the most cutting-edge equipment available. Additionally, we have an app that will be available soon. It will permit communication with the City via your mobile devices.

Central Blair Recreation Commission, in cooperation with the City upgraded six City playgrounds. DCNR recently awarded a grant for a comprehensive plan study to identify the needs of the community and quantify if we are currently meeting these needs. The study will take eight to twelve months to complete. CBRC continues to explore dog park grant funding at this time. I thank community members and business leaders who support CBRC and their fundraising efforts throughout the year. The monies are put to good use and enhance the quality of life in Altoona.

I cut a lot of ribbons in 2018! Downtown and surrounding revitalization showed more progress than we have seen in decades, as steady redevelopment efforts continue. In 2018 we welcomed Bella Lucia, Making Waves Hair Salon, Escape Rooms Altoona, Penn Highlands, Kranich's Jewelers, Wright School (Nehemiah Project), and Herbology, just to name a few.

Additional highlights from my office for 2018 include continuing our efforts with the Blight Task Force and fighting blight. We are moving towards implementing the goals identified in our Comprehensive Blight Strategy Plan, such as the creation of

the Land Bank in October and are in the process of finalizing now. We partnered with Blair Companies, ABCD Corp., The United Way of Blair County, and Operation Our Town to hold our first ever "Altoona Community Clean-Up Day". The event improved the appearance of the designated cleanup areas, created a sense of community for the residents in those neighborhoods, and positively impacted our local environment. Volunteers worked on projects painting fences, cleaning up garbage and debris, pulling weeds from sidewalks, and trimming shrubs. We had 140 volunteers from several churches, service groups, and individuals; as well as numerous financial supporters and donations of products from local businesses. We are currently planning the 2019 Community Clean-Up Day for this fall. I would be remiss if I did not thank the Altoona Area School District and the more than 650 students who participated in Toona Tune-Up 2018. They worked in various parks and locations all around the city sweeping and weeding, and we are very appreciative of their hard work.

I continue to represent Altoona at the State and Federal levels. In 2018 I was sworn in as the 1st Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Municipal League, and reappointed to the National League of Cities "Community and Economic Development" Committee. Both of these positions allow me to have a voice in Harrisburg and Washington to ensure that we are being heard, and our needs are being met locally. Going forward, I will continue to seek new ways to continue to help make Altoona a thriving City. We will build on the successes and accomplishments that we have had in 2018.

In 2019 I intend to work with Council to address several issues such as; walkability, bikeability and connectivity to our public transportation bus stops and safe routes to school and work. We will also be reviewing and updating our strategic plan.

It is essential that we continue to attract the best quality of investments, jobs, products, education and tourists to Altoona. These factors have immediate, significant and positive impact on our City. They help increase property values and the overall vitality of our neighborhoods. Much of the success we have enjoyed over the past year is the result of the collaboration with our stakeholders, businesses and organizations. During my time in office, I have recognized that the City cannot accomplish all things on their own. We depend upon these groups to work together in cooperation with the City, to accomplish tasks that benefit all residents. Thank you for your continued support and investment in our City.

In closing, thank you all so much for being here today – it continues to be my honor to serve the residents of the City of Altoona.

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